

Barbie, if looks could  
kill



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BUSTER**

Hannah Mekeel Pg1 Barbie: If Looks Could Kill Almost every American girl desires a Barbie at some point, for the chance to vicariously live her fabulous life. The average girl from ages 3-11 owns upwards of 10 Barbie dolls throughout her childhood, with hours on end spent exploring a Pepto-Bismol colored world, where Barbie has anydream job. For 53 years, Barbie has been an American standard of beautiful. With her leggy, busty figure and unattainable body measurements, neatly wrapped in pink packaging and a sunny disposition, Barbie has had over 80 careers, ranging from the President to a McDonalds' cashier.

When she's not teaching or fighting fires, she still manages to maintain her Barbie dreamhouse, her body, and her dreamboat of a boyfriend, Ken. In the world of Barbie, a girl can have it all! But not all is sunny in paradise since the emergence of a Barbie backlash, as parents and child development experts begin to see the possible connections between young girls who play with Barbie's and adult woman with body issues or eating disorders. The question becomes; What are these toys teaching young girls about their bodies, their gender, and their role in society? Is the character that has become Barbie a role model for all women can achieve?

Or, have Barbie been teaching young girls that the perfect, attractive, and socially valuable woman is thin, always glamorous, always happy, and always silent? Since Barbie was first debut in 1959, she seemed to be a picture perfect role model for middle class, American girls. She was perfectly thin, had a perfect family, perfect hair, perfect car and house. Yet how was this image of a perfect woman affecting the millions of young girls who were playing with her? Some would argue that Barbie's thin, but busty and hippy

figure, instill in young woman an idea of the perfect body, desired by men and envied by other women, Mekeel Pg 2 || the while, completely unattainable. " If Barbie were an actual woman, she would be 5'9" tall, have a 39" bust, an 18" waist, 33" hips and a size 3 shoe," Slayen wrote in the Huffington . " She likely would not menstruate... she'd have to walk on all fours due to her proportions. " (Katz). Many women admit they started worrying about their weight when they were between the age of 4 and six years old, and many of the girls who have or had an eating disorder admitted that Barbie played a huge role in influencing their attitudes toward their bodies.

Barbie led young girls to believe, if you want Barbie's fabulous life, you have to also look " fabulous". During the formative ages of 4-6, right about the time young girls receive their first Barbie, they really begin to absorb the social standards around them, and the 1961 gem, " Slumber Party Barbie", could not have been a positive influence on young girls. " Slumber Party Barbie" came equipped with a book titled How to Lose Weight , which offered advice like " don't eat," and a bathroom scale permanently set at 110 lbs. Slumber Party Barbie" is something no good parent would expose their young, impressionable daughter to, and something Mattel wouldn't even attempt 40 years later. Mattel has had its missteps in the last 20 years, putting feminist across the country up in arms with the 1992 flop " Teen Talk Barbie", who famously proclaims that " math class is tough". Sure, math class is tough, but shouldn't Barbie be reiterating to girls that math is essential, especially if you want to be just like Barbie and grow up to be a doctor, scientist, astronaut, or whatever you want. Mattel wasted no time

silencing their quintessential bimbo following the backlash. Borger). Another major flaw in Barbie portrayed values is her desire for material wealth. Barbie has everything, but it wasn't always that way. Barbie came from humble beginnings, dressed like Mekeel Pg 3 a typical white, middle-class female of the 1960's. She continued to evolve into mod Barbie, disco Barbie, and by the 1980s " she had the taste of a lottery winner," says M. G. Lord, author of *Forever Barbie*. " At the core of this change is class. " (Borger). Barbie suddenly had a dreamhouse mansion, a convertible sports car, and in more recent years, began wearing designer duds from the likes of Ralph Lauren, Christian Dior, and Bob Mackie.

Barbie advocatesstressthat the problem doesn't lay in Barbie's appearance, or even her values, but with our perceptions of a doll. After all, Barbie is an inanimate object, something that living women shouldn't compare themselves to. If Barbie were real she would likely be divorced from Ken and in debt up to her eyes after remortgaging her dreamhouse, but she's not real. She is a fantasy, which little boys and girls can use when flexing their imaginations to develop a whole world and life for Barbie, as they would see it. It's the ability to make Barbie into anything they want that makes her so appealing to children. We are in danger of looking at a child's toy through an adult's microscope and, of course, seeing all the wrong things. To a child she.. never says she can't play with you, always smiles, will accompany her owner everywhere, and never shouts. Onto her can be projected wishes anddreams. "(Russel) Barbie has also taken the form of many positively influential female role models like Jackie Onassis Kennedy or Olympic athletes. Having experienced first-hand, amongst girls my age, the damages

of low self-esteem and a poor body image, I find it hard to believe that Barbie has played no role in damaging females.

Though a six year old might not process the impact at the time, subconsciously she carries the effects of Barbie's image with her for the rest of her life, affecting the way she sees Mekeel Pg 4 herself and women around her. Sure, Barbie encourages young girl to be whatever they want to be, but only if you're beautiful. With doll collecting being the second most popular hobby, to stamp collecting, and Barbie being a \$1.5 billion dollar industry, she's not going anywhere soon. It is a parent's responsibility to choose their children's toys wisely, considering how it might impact them.

If nothing else, parents should be present in their daughters' lives contextualizing all these images they encounter in the public and in popculture, and reinforcing a positive body imagine and self-esteem. Mattel continues to make efforts to bring Barbie to a place of more positive realism, but until woman are accurately represented and positive portrayed by gender specific toys, Barbie could be a serious danger to a young girls psyche, giving a new meaning to the phrase "if looks could kill."